

01378

1991/04/23

UNCLASSIFIED
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

GEORGE C. OADR
DEC 1 1996

BRIEFING PAPER

39

RELEASED IN PART
B1

TIBET

- o The cycle of violent protests and brutal suppression that characterized Tibet from late 1987 through early 1989 appears to have been broken. Martial law, imposed from March 1989 to May 1990, convinced many Tibetans that demonstrations were futile, and gave Chinese authorities time to develop more sophisticated means of control.
 - Sporadic small-scale demonstrations continued throughout the martial law period and beyond, but attracted little public participation.
 - Massive shows of force during the anniversaries of previous protests deterred new unrest. Security presence in Lhasa varies, but is now increasing in preparation for the May 23 anniversary of the 1951 agreement that incorporated Tibet into the PRC.
- o Ethnic unrest continues to seethe below the surface, and could again erupt if triggered by an acute local grievance or turmoil elsewhere in China.
 - Hundreds of monks and nuns have been expelled from monasteries, and some have been imprisoned for pro-independence activities. The death of a young prisoner in December was ascribed to torture by Tibetan activists, to appendicitis by Chinese officials.
 - Tibetans resent the imposition of Han Chinese culture and social controls, official intrusion into religious life, the influx of an unofficial Han merchant class, and generally higher Han living standards.
 - Hans resent (though less strongly) affirmative action programs for minorities and the fact that minorities generally are not subject to family planning policies.
 - Most Tibetans continue to revere the Dalai Lama and long for independence under his leadership, while Hans have been successfully indoctrinated in the belief that Tibet has always been a part of China.
- o While insisting on political control, most Chinese officials appear genuinely interested in improving social and economic conditions in Tibet. But they face dilemmas common to other countries with disadvantaged minorities.

OCT 24 1996
B1

UNCLASSIFIED

- 2 -

- For example, educating Tibetan children in Chinese risks destruction of their culture, while schooling them in Tibetan jeopardizes job opportunities.
- Moreover, insensitive actions like modernization of housing in Tibetan areas of Lhasa arouses suspicions and may actually degrade real living standards.
- In traditionally theocratic Tibet, religion and culture are inextricably linked to politics, making it impossible for the Chinese to maintain political control without interfering in religion and culture.
- Tibet's second-ranking religious leader, the Panchen Lama, died in 1989. Both the government-sponsored religious associations and the Tibetan exile community now claim primacy in searching for his reincarnation.

o

- In 1987, the Dalai Lama backed away from demands for full independence or return to theocracy.

--

- The Dalai Lama's visit to the U.S., and particularly his meeting with the President, is likely to buoy Tibetan spirits and stiffen resolve on both sides.

- o Since the lifting of martial law, increasing numbers of foreign officials (including Ambassador Lilley) and journalists have been allowed to visit Tibet, to meet officials and even to tour a prison. Beijing appears to have calculated that it gains more by presenting its side of the story than it risks by exposing continuing problems.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Drafted by:EAP/CM:LKRobinson
SECMPOL 2843 4/23/91 x7-6819
Cleared by:EAP/CM:MEMohr
HA:JBishop
EAP:DAnderson

EAP/CM:KMWiedemann
P:CKartman

UNCLASSIFIED